ACADEMIC WRITING HANDBOOK

FOR LEARNERS

IN THE FURTHER
EDUCATION AND
TRAINING (FET)
SECTOR

FURTHER EDUCATION
SUPPORT SERVICE
Seirbhís Tacaíochta
don Bhreisoideachas

etbi
Education and Training
Boards Ireland
*Boird Oideachais agus
Oiliúna Éireann*

Development of this resource

Through regular contact with teaching personnel as well as from the experience of external authenticators, it became apparent that writing and referencing were challenging for many Further Education and Training (FET) learners. A request was issued through the Education and Training Boards of Ireland (ETBI) Quality Assurance (QA) Forum for interested Education and Training Boards (ETBs) to nominate personnel who would work on such resources.

The development of this handbook has been led by the Further Education Support Service (FESS). The working group included:

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All relevant FESS materials were made available to this process. The ETBs involved were generous in contributing relevant materials as well as making their staff available for this development work. This handbook was consulted on locally and ETBI provided support for the design of this resource.

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GLOSSARY

Article – is a piece of writing that is included with other pieces of writing in a publication like a magazine, journal or newspaper.

Assessment – the means by which it is possible to judge what a learner knows, understands and can do as a result of engaging in a learning experience. Assessment can be for the purpose of identifying ways that the learner might be able to improve as well as deciding if they should receive certification for the knowledge, skills and competence that they have demonstrated.

Assessor – The person who makes assessment decisions on your assessment work.

Bibliography – the entire list of sources of information and data that you used in the development of your written assessment work. It should include sources that you read/engaged with, but did not cite in the work.

Brainstorm – a gathering of creative ideas, thoughts, suggestions on a topic or theme that are generally contributed by individuals in a group.

Citation – is a reference to the source of information used in a learner's research/written assessment work, for example, (FESS, 2018).

Cite – to refer to a source of information.

Critique – a detailed analysis and assessment of something, especially a literary, philosophical, or political theory.

Data – can be information, facts and statistics that are gathered for research purposes.

External Authenticator – is a subject matter expert who provides independent authoritative confirmation of **fair and consistent** assessment of learners in accordance with national standards

Figure – can be an illustration or diagram of the information found in a text.

Information – can be knowledge gained from research, investigation, study or other sources.

Literature – can be written work such as books and other writings on particular subjects that are published or leaflets or other printed materials that contain information or advice.

Mind Map – is a diagram that can be used to organise information in a visual way.

Narrative – a report (written or spoken) that is presented in a logical sequence that supports a particular viewpoint or argument.

Paraphrase – saying the same thing that another author or source says but using different words.

Parameter – is a boundary or limit to the scope of a particular activity such as a research project.

Periodical – a journal, magazine or newspaper published at regular intervals.

Plain English approach – is a way of communicating with your audience or reader so that they understand what you are saying the first time they read or hear it.

Reader – is the person who will be reading and assessing your written assessment work. These could include the tutor/teacher/trainer, external authenticator, appeals examiner and other key personnel involved in the quality assured assessment process.

Reference – mentioning or alluding to something such as the source of a piece of information.

Reference List – a list of all the sources that you have referred to within the main body of your written assessment work and these should be compiled in alphabetical order at the back of your written assessment work.

Research – an organised and systematic investigation into a topic and the study of information, materials and sources in order to know the facts and draw conclusions.

Scholarly literature – is writing completed by researchers who are experts in their fields of study.

Secondary reference – sometimes you will find a source mentioned in another text, a secondary reference is when you quote or paraphrase from that without going to the original text.

Source – the place from where the information originates.

Summarise – including the main points from a source in a brief statement.

Syntax – refers to how words and phrases are arranged in order to create well-formed sentences.

Table – is the word used to describe how a set of facts or figures can be systematically displayed in columns and rows.

Text – refers to the content of a book or other written, printed or electronically available work.

Verb – is a word that is used to describe an action, an occurrence, or a state of being. Verbs are the action words in a sentence that describe what the subject is doing.

Written assessment work – Written assessment work includes assignments, projects, essays, collection of work, presentations, etc. that a learner is submitting for assessment purposes.
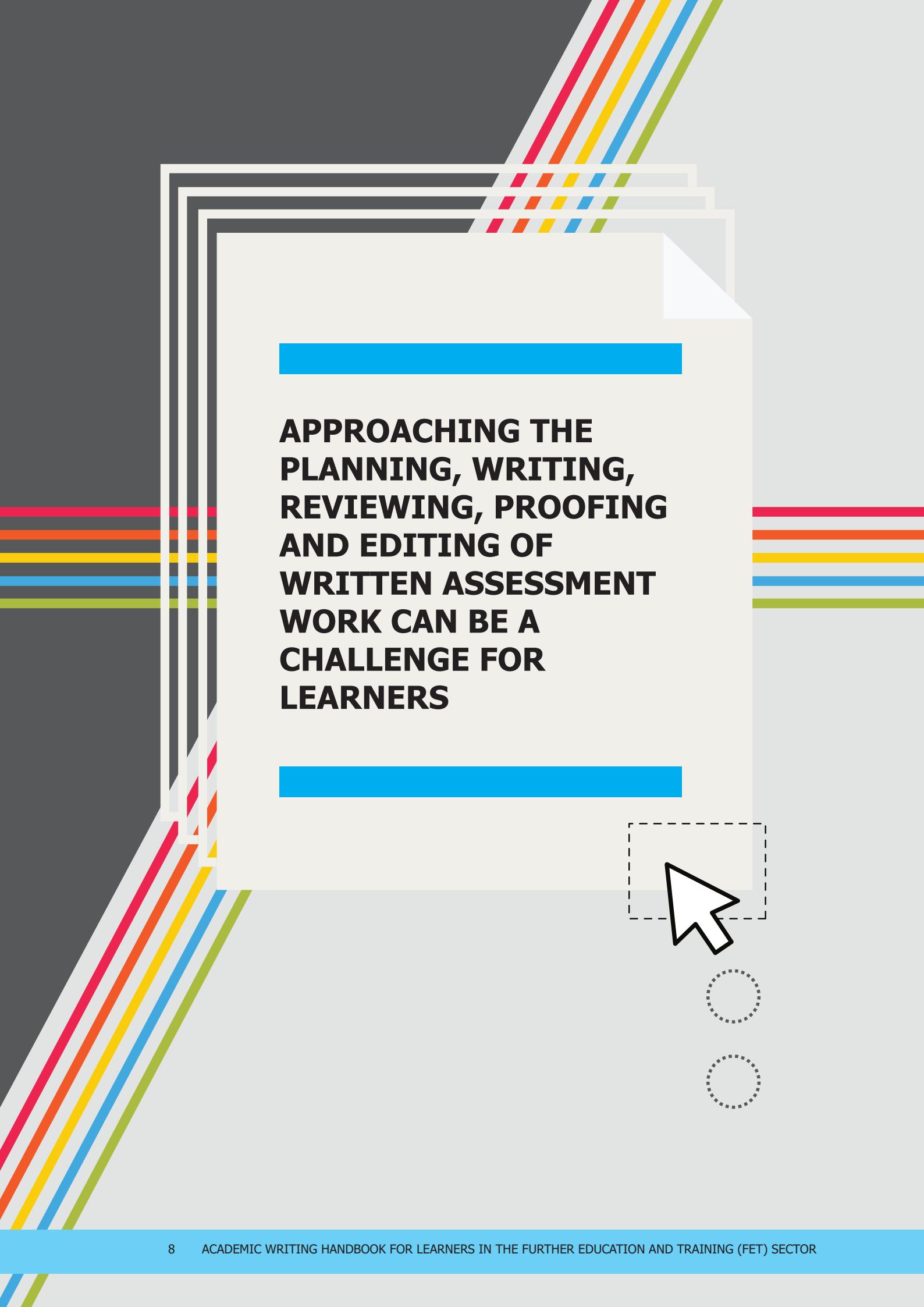
APPROACHING THE PLANNING, WRITING, REVIEWING, PROOFING AND EDITING OF WRITTEN ASSESSMENT WORK CAN BE A CHALLENGE FOR LEARNERS
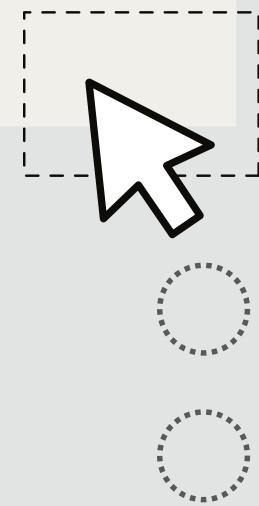
INTRODUCTION

In order to meet the requirements of your course, it is likely that you will have to produce some written work to meet the assessment requirements of your programme. In this context, writing that is completed for assessment and certification purposes is regarded as '*academic writing'*.

The purpose of a piece of academic writing is to communicate the information that you have researched, processed, discussed and analysed, in a way that the reader can understand and also in a way that meets the purpose for which the writing is being completed. When writing to meet the requirements for assessment, the writing must be presented so that it is clear, concise, objective, understandable and informative to the reader. You should also acknowledge where you got the information and research that you used in your academic writing. Academic writing isn't always easy to do, and more often than not, requires direction, practice and feedback.

The purpose of this handbook, therefore, is to provide some guidance on writing for learners who are engaged in programmes of learning equivalent to levels 5 and 6 on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). However, it is important to note that this resource may also be a useful tool to other learners at other learning levels and may also support teaching staff in structuring or approaching the teaching of writing skills.

By developing and improving writing skills, learners can develop good academic practices for drafting and writing assessment work. Well-written assessment work will consequently improve overall grades attained. Developing good academic writing practices will help you on your current programme of study, progression to further studies and any future engagement with lifelong learning.
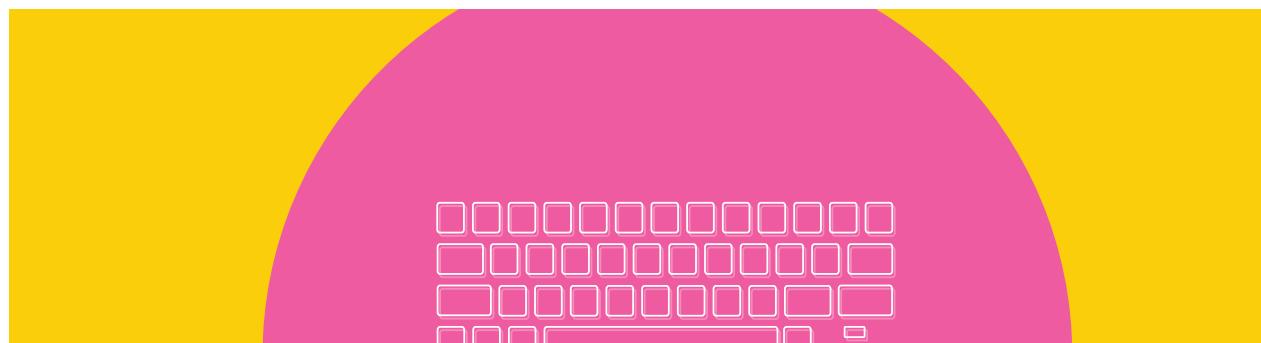
WHAT IS ACADEMIC WRITING?

There are different types of writing that you will encounter or have to complete as part of your journey on your further education and training course. Further information on types of writing is available in Appendix 1 - Types of writing you may encounter in FET.

> Academic writing is one way of writing and can be defined in many ways. One definition states that academic writing is writing that is "clear, concise, focussed, structured and backed up by evidence. Its purpose is to aid the reader's understanding" (University of Leeds, 2019).

Academic writing is a *formal style* of writing and is generally written in a more objective way, focussing on facts and not unduly influenced by personal opinions. It is used to meet the assessment requirements for a qualification; the publication requirements for academic literature such as books and journals; and documents prepared for conference presentations.

Academic writing is *structured* and *logical* and therefore brings the reader from one key point to the next. It is important for you when you are writing to convey the information clearly and concisely, as, in terms of writing success, quantity does not always indicate quality. Your writing should also be *supported by evidence/research* which demonstrates understanding of underlying theories, processes and practices. Sources of the ideas/thoughts/information must always be referenced. When incorporating facts and other information, these should not just be copied and pasted, but instead should be used as the basis for a discussion or forming an argument. In general, a plain English approach to writing academically is acceptable but jargon, slang words or phrases should be avoided. Where there is a word count guide or restriction, this is to encourage the writer to express all of their insights and convey all of the relevant information and analysis in a clear and concise manner.
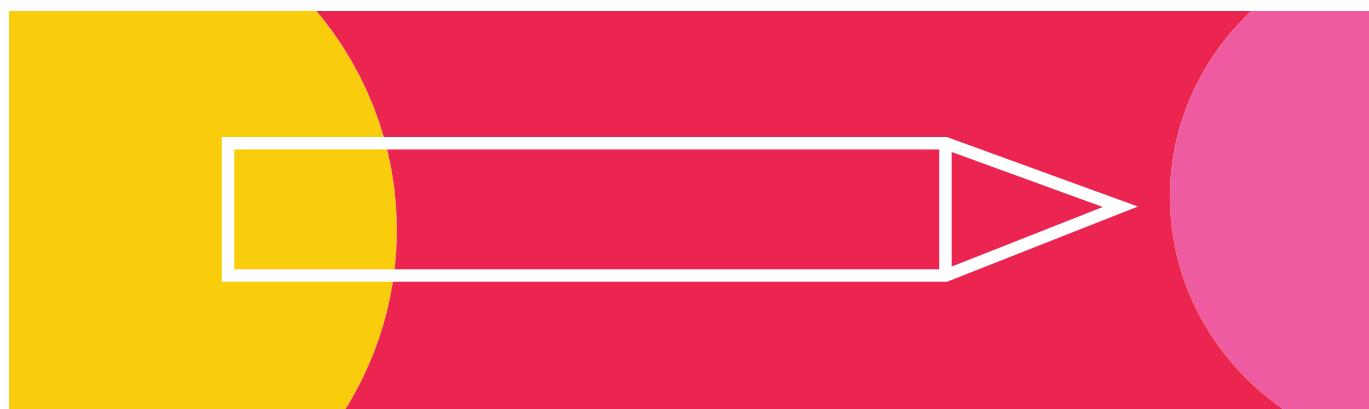
It is important to remember that good quality academic writing should:

- be understandable to everyone who is likely to read it

- clearly communicate relevant information

- minimise the use of jargon or buzz-words

- be concisely written and keep to the key point(s)

- be focused on providing information and presenting facts

- analyse the findings of the research

- include objective reflection

- present different points of view, some for and some against the argument

- make sure that each point of view should be supported by research

- avoid broad, sweeping or generalised statements

- acknowledge sources

Table 1: Key features of academic writing
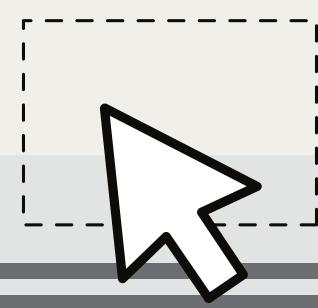
THE WRITING PROCESS

There are many different approaches to academic writing and it is important that you find one that works for you. Regardless of the approach you use, it should include key stages or steps that include planning, drafting, revising and proofreading. The important thing to remember is that good academic writing is a process that involves a number of steps and when you get used to approaching your written work in this way, it should make the task of writing a little easier.

Here is an example of a writing process that you can use (Figure 1). This is the process that is used throughout this handbook.

Step 1
Getting started on the draft

Step 2
Writing the draft

Step 3
Reviewing the draft

Step 4
Editing and proofreading the draft

Step 5
Presenting and submitting finished written assessment work

Figure 1: Writing process adapted from Trinity College Dublin (n.d.)

LET'S GET STARTED ON THE DRAFT

Planning for writing

Usually learners leave the class or lesson with a relatively clear idea of what is expected of them in their written assessment work. Even with this clarity, learners may still find it hard to get started and may find themselves sitting with a pen and blank page, which can be daunting. This is often the hardest stage as you try to gather your ideas and organise your thoughts. You may find the following useful in planning and preparing for your written assessment work.

What have you been asked to do in your assessment?

It is important that you carefully read the assessment brief that you have been given. This should tell you:

- what you have to do
- how you should do it
- what you have to produce
- how it will be marked
- when you have to submit

It is important to study the verbs used in the assessment instructions that you are given, as the verbs help determine the depth of understanding of the topic required. For example, there is a significant difference between being asked to *list* the three key factors relating to a topic and being asked to *evaluate* the three key factors relating to a topic. The depth of knowledge you are required to have increases as you engage in programmes that are higher up on the levels on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ).

LET'S GET STARTED ON THE DRAFT

Who are you writing for?

It is most likely that you will be submitting your written assessment work to the person teaching the programme who is likely to be the person assessing your work and deciding what mark and grade will be awarded. However, when writing it is important to realise that others will also be reading your written assessment work. Remember, the purpose of your written assessment work is to show comprehensive knowledge and understanding of the subject matter and that you can apply that knowledge and understanding in various contexts. Apart from the assessor, others who may also read or examine your work may include:

■ staff within the organisation who may examine the work as part of the provider's assessment process

■ the external authenticator may read your work as part of the moderation process

■ other personnel and an appeals external authenticator will be reading your written assessment work, in the event of the appeal

How do you get started?

Once you are clear on what you have to do, here are some techniques that you might find useful in getting started with preparing and planning the content for your writing. These include brainstorming and mind-mapping.

TIP: If you are not sure about any aspect of what is required in the assessment brief, make sure that you ask the teaching staff for clarification.

Brainstorming

Brainstorming is a method of generating ideas. When you have your topic, begin by thinking of all the relevant ideas and themes associated with it and create a mind map (see page 17 & 18) which may help you organise the ideas. Brainstorming will give you an idea of how large the subject matter is and will give you a starting point to organise your ideas into some order.

There are four guidelines that should be applied when generating ideas:

1. generate as many ideas as you can
2. avoid criticising any of the ideas put forth, particularly if brainstorming as part of a group
3. attempt to combine or improve upon previously generated ideas
4. encourage the generation of wild or novel ideas (think outside the box)
   (Adapted from Osborn, 1957)

TIP: Brainstorming can be just as good when you do it by yourself as when you do it in a group.

Mind Mapping

The mind map is a visual tool to help you see your ideas and the relationship(s) between them. It is a dynamic tool and may change as your ideas develop. Remind yourself that you have to cover the entire topic and try not to get side-tracked on one individual point. While it is useful to be as creative as possible, it is recommended that you follow a number of steps when creating your mind map.

1	place the topic at the centre of the page
2	work outwards to map all your ideas around the topic like branches on a tree
3	each branch represents a key point and can then be further developed by branching out in the same way
4	use different coloured pens as well as images to connect related ideas or concepts
5	organise key points (branches) in a logical sequence to ensure coherence and cohesiveness when writing up the piece
6	the key points are used as the focus for the research
7	keep referring back to the topic or question at the centre of the mind map - this is the core of your assessment

Table 2: Steps to creating your mind map
(Adapted from Buzan and Buzan, 2000)

TIP: Mind mapping can be done using paper or technology. There are many apps available that may be used to successfully create mind maps.

These examples of mind maps are both based on the process that this group went through in the development of this Academic Writing Handbook for Learners in the Further Education and Training (FET) Sector. There are many mind mapping tools available both in books and online that may best suit you and your learning style.

Figure 2: Sample mind map

LET'S GET STARTED ON THE DRAFT

What is Academic Writing?

Writing for Assessment

Formal Writing

Structured/Logical/Objective

Checklist for written assessment work

Types of writing

Appendices

Academic Writing

Reference

Referencing Handbook for the Further Education and Training (FET) Sector

Referencing

CITATION

PLAGIARISM

REFERENCE LIST

BIBLIOGRAPHY

SOURCE

HARVARD STYLE

Writing Process

Getting started

Writing the draft

Review the draft

Editing and Proofreading

Presenting and Submitting

Figure 3: Sample mind map

Researching

Now that you have identified all of the ideas associated with your topic, where do you go from here? If you used a mind map, it should help you identify the ideas associated with your topic and provide you with a focus for your research. You can add value to your written assessment work by adding facts and figures from articles, newspapers, journals and other sources. Additionally, opinions and comments from people can also be used to support the points you are making in your writing. However, with so many information sources at our fingertips, knowing where to start, sorting through it all and selecting what you need can be overwhelming.

Before you begin your research, there are things you should consider that will help you identify relevant sources and focus your research.

What kind of information is needed and where can it be found?

The following table categorises the various types of information that you might be looking for and tells you where you might be able to find this information when researching for your written assessment work.

What type of information I am looking for	Where I am likely to find it
Current event	Newspaper | Online news feed
Statistics	Government Census data | Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI)
Scholarly literature and theories	Academic articles | Periodicals | Books
Commercial products	Company websites | Patents and standards
Local History	Libraries | Government offices | Local newspapers

Table 3: Examples of where you might find different types of information

LET'S GET STARTED ON THE DRAFT

How much information is needed?

While it's good to look at different sources of information, be careful not to get bogged down in too many documents and end up feeling overwhelmed. Consider the following:

- do you need to consider all sides of the topic, for example, do you need to research the benefits of exercise, or, do you need to research the benefits and risks of exercise?

- if you are required to do a comparison, you have to make sure that you have similar amounts of knowledge and understanding of the elements you are comparing

- if you are required to discuss a topic, you will need to present a similar number of points in agreement with as well as opposing the argument

- how deep do you have to explore a topic, for example, are you required to explain something about a topic or are you required to analyse key elements of the topic?

It is important to check back with your teaching staff and to refer back to the assessment brief if in doubt.

Types of Research

There are two main types of research, primary and secondary, and your assessment may require the use of either or a combination of both.

Primary Research

Information that is gathered first hand by you, the researcher. It may include surveys, interviews, observations, experiments, focus groups.

Secondary Research

Information that is gathered from existing material (previously gathered and presented by somebody else). This may include information and data from books, brochures, leaflets, magazines, newspapers, the internet, reports and other research papers.

Primary Research

As primary research generally involves individuals, consideration must be given to factors including consent of participants, integrity of the research, confidentiality of research responses, anonymity of participants, research ethics and storage of data.

There are two approaches to primary research - qualitative and quantitative.

TIP: Clarification should be sought from teaching staff on factors that should be considered when conducting primary research, such as, ethics, permission, confidentiality, anonymity and objectivity.

Qualitative research

Qualitative research is research that explores people's attitudes or opinions towards a specific topic or problem. It generally looks at the *what/why/where/when/how* questions. It is based upon people's reasons, opinions, motivations and behaviours. It can provide insight into a problem and can uncover trends.

Quantitative research

Quantitative research is used to explore and uncover or measure patterns. It generally looks at the *to what extent/how many* questions. It can measure the data and quantify a problem relating to a specific topic. It is most useful when transformed into statistics to back up a claim or statement. It is generally carried out with a larger group.

When both qualitative and quantitative methods are used together, this is called **Mixed Methods Research**.

Considerations in planning primary research

There are elements that need to be considered when planning for primary research. Consider the questions illustrated in the graphic below:

What do I want to find out?

How do I plan on finding it out?

Who am I going to talk to/observe/survey (subjects or participants)?

How am I going to be able to gain access to these groups or individuals?

What are my biases about this topic?

How can I make sure my biases don't influence my research?

Primary Research

Figure 4: Considerations in planning primary research

LET'S GET STARTED ON THE DRAFT

The list below explains some of the techniques that you might wish to use to gather primary research data, if you have to complete primary research for your written assessment work.

Gathering Primary Research Information (data)

Focus Group Discussion:
A focus group is a small group of people, deliberately selected, to discuss a specific topic or subject. It is used to explore people's attitudes, beliefs, experiences, opinions, perceptions.

Interview:
Interviews are question and answer sessions conducted with an individual or a group. They can be either structured (with questions decided in advance), semi-structured (some questions decided in advance) or unstructured (questions are not pre-determined).

Observation:
Observations involve taking careful notes of an event or activity as it happens. What is seen or observed is noted or recorded making these factual and free of bias.

Survey:
Surveys usually involve a questionnaire to gather information (data) from a sample of the population.

Secondary Research

Secondary research is often the easiest and least biased way to research a topic. It involves finding and examining other people's research information or data. It can be used in conjunction with primary research to back up opinion or to validate findings. Secondary research from credible and reliable sources will add value to your written assessment work. The graphic below identifies some sources of secondary research that you may use. Further information can be found in the Referencing Handbook for the FET Sector on the sources of information (p.10) and evaluating your sources (p.20).
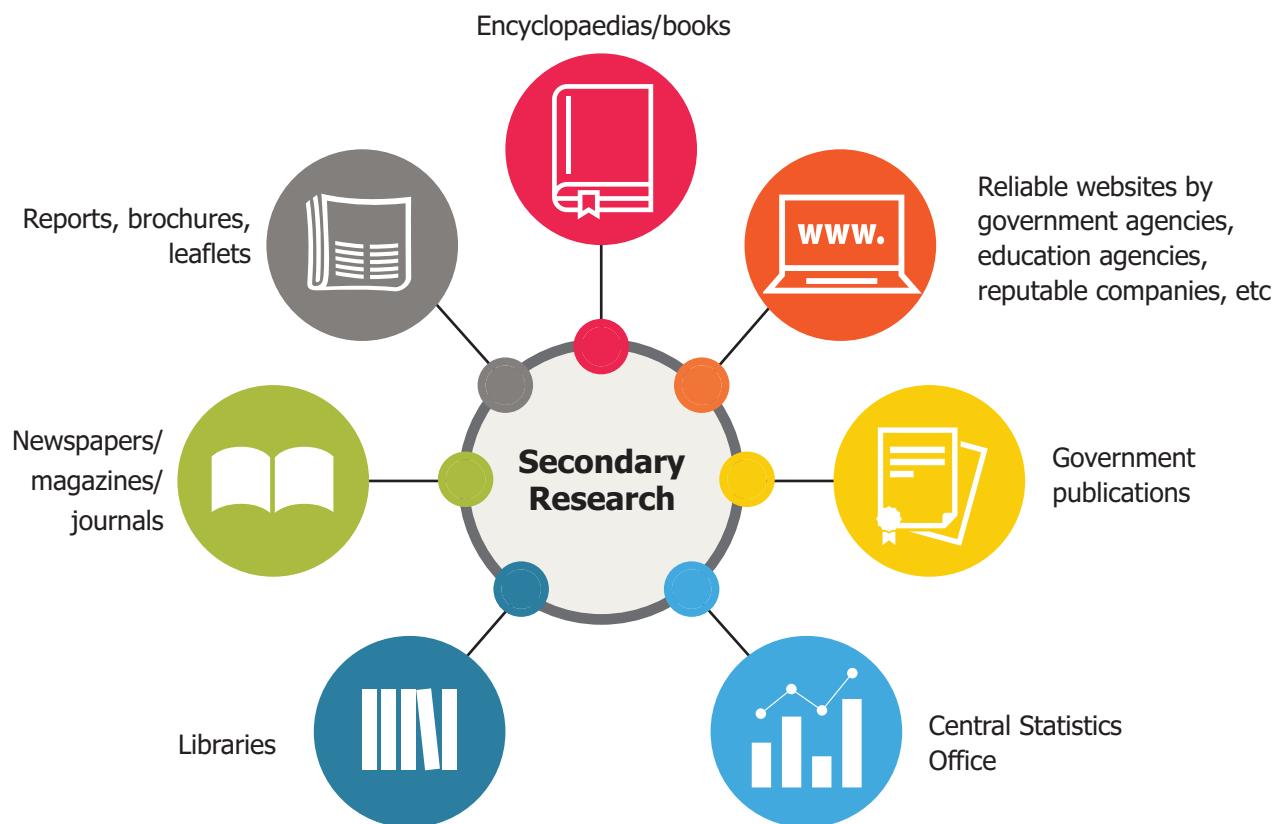
Figure 5: Sources of secondary research

LET'S GET STARTED ON THE DRAFT

When you find an information source that you think you might be interested in you could:

- check the title and skim the summary, if available, to see if the publication might be useful

- scan the index to check if it contains relevant information

- skim over the contents, conclusions, headings/sub-headings, illustrations and captions to get an overview of the content

- check the bibliography which can point you to other useful research

TIP: As soon as you start to use published material for research it is crucial to record all information that you will need to reference your source (see Referencing Handbook for the FET Sector pp. 19-22)

How to evaluate information sources?

Good academic writing involves being able to gather relevant information and being able to judge how well it will contribute to the argument you could make/present in your written assessment work.

> "It is important to evaluate your information sources and to be able to judge:
>
> ■ Is this information reliable?
>
> ■ Is this a fact, a theory, an opinion or a suggestion?
>
> ■ Is this information up-to-date?
>
> ■ Are the ideas backed-up by research and are they widely accepted and authoritative?
>
> ■ Is this information just a popular notion that may be unsubstantiated?"
>
> (Referencing Handbook for the FET Sector, 2019, p.19)

While it can be difficult to establish the authenticity of some sources of information such as webpages, podcasts, blogs, etc., a helpful tool is called the CRAAP test, as shown in Figure 6, CRAAP test.

C Currency

R Relevance

A Authority

A Accuracy

P Purpose

Currency | The timeliness of the information

When was the information published or posted? Has it been updated or revised? If so, when was the last update or revision? How current are the references (if any)? How current are the web links? Have any expired? Do you need up-to-date sources for your assessment or will an older source be acceptable?

Relevance | The importance of the information for your needs

Does the topic relate to your assessment? Does the information answer any of your questions? Is it at an appropriate level for your assignment - not too basic and not too advanced? How does it compare to other sources you looked at? Is it scholarly, academic, well-presented or just an opinion? Would you cite it in your assignment?

Authority | The source of the information

Is an author given? Who is the author, publisher or source? Is the web page signed? Is the author qualified to write on this subject? Are they affiliated to a research institute or university? Are they cited by others? Does the URL give information about the source, for example, .ie, .org, .edu, .com

Accuracy | The reliability, truthfulness and correctness of the content

Is the information supported by evidence? Is the web information error -free? Does the web information contain any spelling or grammar or other noticeable errors? Does the tone of the language seem unbiased and free of emotion?

Purpose | The reason the information exists

What's the purpose of the information? Is it trying to teach, inform, sell, entertain or persuade? Do the writers make their intentions clear? Is there any political, cultural, religious or personal bias or propaganda? Does the point of view seem impartial and objective? Is there any advertising on the page or webpage?

(Adapted from Meriam Library, California State University, 2010)

Figure 6: CRAAP test

Thinking critically about your research

Thinking critically about your research is a vital part of the writing process. Critical thinking involves questioning and making decisions about the sources of information, the findings emerging from those sources, the reliability of the research and its usefulness in supporting the argument that you are trying to make.

Demonstrating critical thinking involves:

■ questioning what you have read (for example, is it objective? what was the motivation for the writing? does the author present a balanced view?) (Manchester University, 2019)

■ distinguishing fact from opinion (Wong, 2015)

■ recognising that just because research is published does not necessarily mean that it is reliable

■ sometimes disagreeing with research findings

■ considering what some other writers have to say about a particular piece of research.

NOW GET WRITING THE DRAFT

Introduction

Writing is a skill that can be developed and improved over time. In order to continuously improve your writing, you will have to evaluate and critique your writing on an on-going basis. This section will look at the basics of writing, how to build it up from sentences to paragraphs, using transition words and phrases and will look at various punctuation marks. Paraphrasing and summarising will also be covered. This section will conclude with some guidance on integrating graphics within your written assessment work, structuring your writing, and referencing your sources.

What is a sentence?

A sentence is a group of words put together in a way that expresses an idea. A sentence always begins with a capital letter and ends with a full stop, question mark or exclamation mark. A sentence should always include a subject (who or what the sentence is about) and a verb (a word to describe an action or state).

Sentences can be short or long; there's no correct number of words. However, if you find that your sentences go on for lines, check if you should split it up into two sentences. If you need to join two sentences together then you must use a joining word known as a 'conjunction'. Conjunctions include: and, then, but, therefore.

TIP: Changing the order of words in a sentence can help to make the meaning of a sentence clearer and easier to understand. It is important to make a sentence as clear as you can.

Sentences are usually categorised based on the number and types of clauses.

Types of sentences	Example of sentences
SIMPLE SENTENCES a single independent clause	Our centre is always the first to open in the morning.
COMPOUND SENTENCES two independent clauses joined by a conjunction	Our centre is always the first to open in the morning and it's usually the last to close in the evening.
COMPLEX an independent clause and one or more dependent clauses	I did my homework while the kids watched the TV.
COMPOUND-COMPLEX contains three or more clauses (of which at least two are independent and one is dependent)	You can handwrite your assignments, but using the computer is better as you can easily fix your mistakes.

NOW GET WRITING THE DRAFT

Writing that contains mostly short, simple sentences can be uninteresting or even irritating to read. Writing that consists of mostly long complex sentences can be difficult to read and understand. When writing you should try to have a combination of both.

Problems to watch out for:

■ **Run-on sentences** – two separate sentences that the writer has failed to separate with a full stop, question mark or exclamation mark. For example:

I enjoy the practical parts of the course the most as I find them more interesting and easier to follow.
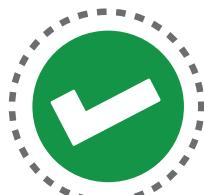
I enjoy the practical parts of the course the most. I find them more interesting and easier to follow.

TIP: Read your piece aloud. If you stop in speech then you should stop in writing.

■ **Sentence fragments** – these are unfinished sentences i.e. they do not contain a complete idea. For example:

❌ I don't think that I will be able to afford the tickets. Because I am not working.

✅ I don't think that I will be able to afford the tickets because I am not working.

TIP: Dependent clauses should not appear on their own.

■ **Rambling sentences** – many clauses often connected by a conjunction.

❌ We went to London on holidays and then we went to visit Buckingham Palace and then we saw the Queen arriving and then we went back to the hotel and turned on the television and there we were on the news!

✅ We went to London on holidays. We visited Buckingham Palace and saw the Queen arriving. Afterwards we went back to the hotel, turned on the television and saw ourselves on the news.

TIP: If your sentence contains more than two conjunctions, then it is likely a rambling sentence.

NOW GET WRITING THE DRAFT

What is a paragraph?

A paragraph is a series of sentences that are coherently organised and generally relate to a single idea. Paragraphs subdivide your writing according to topics or key points. Each paragraph should discuss just one idea.

The opening sentence of a paragraph is often the **Topic Sentence**. This sentence informs the reader what the paragraph will be about. Try reading the first sentence of each paragraph of an article – this will give you an idea of the key points for the whole text.

The rest of the paragraph continues with specific statements to explain or support the topic sentence. These are called **support sentences**. All sentences that follow the topic sentence must then contribute to your argument by providing supporting ideas, and/or specific examples in a logical and coherent order.

Concluding sentences *are used to conclude a paragraph, there can be different types of concluding sentences. You can summarise what you have just said in a 'recap' type sentence. Alternatively, you may wish to finish with a sentence that will bring you on to the next paragraph.*

Below you will see an example of how a paragraph is constructed using a topic sentence, a number of supporting sentences and a concluding sentence.

Topic Sentence
Exercise is one of the most effective ways of improving our mental health.
Support Sentence 1
Firstly, physical exercise can counteract the symptoms of depression and contribute to improved mood as exercise releases chemicals that regulate mood and sleep.
Support Sentence 2
Additionally, exercise can help people cope in a healthy way when presented with mental or emotional challenges in life. Exercise is a far better alternative to alcohol and drug use or other negative behaviours (Harris, Cronkite and Moos, 2006).
Support Sentence 3
Finally, participating in physical activities can offer opportunities for interactions with people and can expand a person's social support networks. Feeling socially included is an important factor in a person's quality of life (Higgins, 2008).
Recap: Clearly, the positive effects of exercise indicate that participation should be encouraged.
or
Transition: While there is much research on the benefits of exercise, there are also studies that claim that *too* much exercise can have a negative impact on health.

Table 4: Structuring a paragraph

Here's what the full paragraph looks like with the final sentence acting as a transition that leads into the next paragraph:

Topic sentence

Exercise is one of the most effective ways of improving our mental health. Firstly, physical exercise can counteract the symptoms of depression and contribute to improved mood as exercise releases chemicals that regulate mood and sleep. Additionally, exercise can help people cope in a healthy way when presented with mental or emotional challenges in life. Exercise is a far better alternative to alcohol and drug use or other negative behaviours (Harris, Cronkite and Moos, 2006). Finally, participating in physical activities can offer opportunities for interactions with people and can expand a person's social support networks. Feeling socially include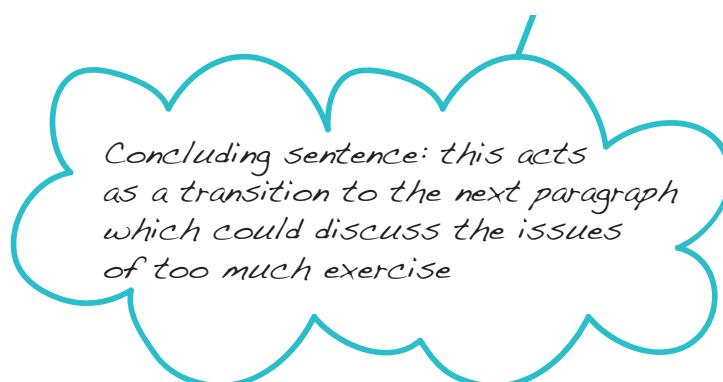d is an important factor in a person's quality of life (Higgins, 2008). While there is much research on the benefits of exercise, there are also studies that claim that *too* much exercise can have a negative impact on health.

Concluding sentence: this acts as a transition to the next paragraph which could discuss the issues of too much exercise

Transition Words or Phrases

Transition words or phrases allow you to move logically and smoothly from one sentence to the next. See Table 5 for a list of transition words.

Using the same paragraph as above, have a look at the use of the transition words in the paragraph (*highlighted in blue*) and see how they help develop the idea and help the reader follow your train of thought:

Exercise is one of the most effective ways of improving our mental health. Firstly, physical exercise can counteract the symptoms of depression and increase mood as exercise releases chemicals that regulate mood and sleep. Additionally, exercise can help people cope in a healthy way when presented with mental or emotional challenges in life. Exercise is a far better alternative to alcohol, drugs or other negative behaviours (Harris, Cronkite and Moos, 2006). Finally, participating in physical activities can offer opportunities for interactions with people and can expand a person's social support networks. Feeling socially included is an important factor in a person's quality of life (Higgins, 2008).

NOW GET WRITING THE DRAFT

The following table gives more examples of transition words that can be used:

To show........	Words that can be used ......
To show addition/similarity	again, and, also, besides, indeed, moreover, equally important, first (second, etc.), further, furthermore, in addition, additionally, in the first place, next, too
To give examples	for example, for instance, such as, in fact, specifically, that is, to illustrate, particularly
To compare	also, similarly, in the same manner, correspondingly, likewise, equally, by the same token
To contrast	although, and yet, at the same time, but, despite, conversely, instead, even though, however, in contrast, in spite of, in opposition, nevertheless, on the contrary, on the other hand, still, though
To summarise or conclude	all in all, to conclude, in conclusion, thus, so, in other words, in short, in summary, therefore, consequently, to sum up, as a result
To show time	after, afterwards, as, as long as, as soon as, at last, before, during, earlier, finally, formerly, immediately, later, meanwhile, next, since, shortly, subsequently, then, thereafter, until, when, while
To show place or direction	above, below, beyond, close, elsewhere, farther on, here, nearby, opposite, to the left
To indicate logical relationship	therefore, accordingly, as a result, because, consequently, for this reason, hence, if, otherwise, since, so, then, thus

Table 5: List of transition words

Punctuation marks – what they mean and how to use them

Punctuation is used by the writer to help create sense, clarify meaning or create emphasis within the writing.

Punctuation marks are like signals to the reader as to *how* the piece of text should be read, such as where to pause or stop, what words to emphasise or where to raise or lower the voice if reading aloud.

Have a look at the two signs below to see how punctuation marks can alter the meaning of sentences.

SLOW, CATTLE CROSSING

SLOW CATTLE CROSSING

NOW GET WRITING THE DRAFT

Punctuation Mark		Explanation	Example
.	Full Stop	Used to mark the end of a sentence	In this article, we are informed of the barriers to effective communication.
,	Comma	Used to mark a pause in a sentence Used to separate ideas or elements	The article, surprisingly, was interesting. The information presented was clear, factual and objective.
:	Colon	Used to precede a list of items or explanations	The qualities of a successful entrepreneur include the following: creativity, discipline, confidence, determination and open-mindedness.
;	Semi-colon	Used to separate phrases in a list or connect two independent clauses. It is stronger than a comma and not as strong as a full stop	On our holidays we visited the zoo; the wax museum; attended a play and went on an open-top bus tour. Michael went to the library; Tina went to football training.
-	hyphen	Used to join 2 or more words together (there are no spaces on either side of the hyphen.)	This two-year programme is divided into four modules.

Punctuation Mark		Explanation	Example
_	Dash	Used to place emphasis on the text after or before the dashes (the opposite of parenthesis) Used to indicate a pause (There are spaces on either side of the dash) Used to indicate a range	You can tell from a photograph – especially a formal portrait – if the person is aware of being photographed. King Lear was a deeply flawed character – he was gullible, arrogant, morally blind and rash.
( )	Parenthesis	Used to separate out information that is not essential to the meaning of the sentence The reader puts less emphasis on the words within parenthesis	King Lear was a deeply flawed character (gullible, arrogant, morally blind and rash). The emerging trend is significant (see Table 2).
!	Exclamation mark	Used to add emphasis or exclaim	It was incredible!
?	Question mark	Used to ask a question	Is this the trend of the future?
`	Apostrophe	Used to show ownership To show when a letter is omitted	Blackmores's research clearly shows the possibility for… It's worrying that we do not yet know the implications of…

Table 6: List of commonly used punctuation marks

Paraphrasing and Summarising

Paraphrasing and summarising are two critical skills of good writers. It is important to be able to paraphrase and summarise so that you can integrate your research findings and ideas into your writing without having to rely on directly quoting material. All sources cited must be referenced.

Paraphrasing is when you take an author's information, idea or suggestion and **put it into your own** words. You are still using someone's work so you must reference it. You do not need to use quotation marks when you paraphrase, but you must clearly show the reader the original source of your information. You must be very careful to indicate which part of your writing is a paraphrase of the original source so that the reader is clear on the source used.

Summarising is providing a **brief statement of the main points** of a piece of work. This is also a way of referring to someone else's information, idea or suggestion without using direct quotations. You must not change the original meaning and you still need to cite and reference the source.

The following extract is taken from *Safety and Health at Work: QQI Level 5* (Nifast, 2015, p.3):

> Responsibility for safety and health management ultimately rests with the employer. This responsibility is normally delegated to executive directors, senior managers, line managers, supervisors and employees. Each person's authority and duties should be clearly defined, documented and communicated to them. The organisational and reporting structure for implementing these duties should be illustrated in an in-house organisational chart which should be included in the company's safety statement.

The following are two different **examples of how you might paraphrase**:

> Employers are ultimately responsible for health and safety in the workplace (Nifast, 2015).
> or
> According to Nifast (2015) responsibility for health and safety is often delegated to key senior employees within the organisation.

Next is an **example of a summary** of the extract:

> While health and safety is primarily the responsibility of the employer, it is often delegated to personnel in roles of authority and responsibility (Nifast, 2015). They also say that it is essential that each person's responsibility is clearly defined and included in the safety statement (Nifast, 2015).

Writing in the first, second or third person

Writing in the first, second or third person are ways of describing points of view. Where an objective approach is necessary, you may be expected to write in the third person. Other assessments may require that you write in the first person, where more personal responses are needed. You should follow the guidance provided by your teaching staff about which approach to use. Whatever approach you follow, it is essential that you are consistent throughout each piece of written work.

The **first person** is the 'I'/'We' perspective. When we talk about ourselves, our opinions and the things that happen to us, we generally speak in the first person. A sentence is written in the first person by using first-person pronouns e.g. I, me, my, mine and myself. We, us, our and ourselves are also first-person pronouns.

Second person is the 'you' perspective. The second person's point of view belongs to the person (or people) being addressed. A sentence is written in the second person by using second-person pronouns e.g. you, your, yours, yourself, yourselves.

Third person is the 'he'/'she'/'one'/'it'/'they' perspective. The third person's viewpoint belongs to the person (or people) being talked about and can include naming people, for example, Jones claimed that… or naming groups, for example, teachers, students, etc. and uses pronouns like he, him, his, himself, she, her, hers, herself, it, its, itself, they, them, their, theirs, and themselves. Writing in the third person can also include reference to one or the author (when referring to themselves).

Many educational institutions require academic work to be written in the third person.

TIP: You should check with your teaching staff to see if you should write in the first, second or third person in your written assessment work.

The following examples of sentences written in first, second and third person

First Person	I am undertaking this research in the area of early childhood nutrition as I believe that early nutrition has an impact on a person's health in the long term.
Second person	You would need to make sure that all sources of information are reliable and accurate before using them in your academic work.
Third person	Jones (2017) claimed that exercising or being in the outdoors has many benefits. Students report better learning experiences when technology is used as part of teaching.

Table 7: Examples of sentences written in the first, second and third person

From sentence to paragraph to the completed writing

Creating **logical flow** in your writing is important to allow the reader to read seamlessly through your written work. Remember, readers want to be able to follow your train of thought not only from sentence to sentence and from paragraph to paragraph, but right throughout the whole piece. They don't want to read a paragraph only to find that it has led to a dead end. Similarly, they don't want to move to the next paragraph only to be met with a completely new and unrelated idea. So how does a writer ensure logical flow?

STEP 2

NOW GET WRITING THE DRAFT

There are a number of ways that you, as the writer, can ensure logical flow in a piece of writing:

- transitional words and phrases can be used to help the reader follow the writer's train of thought, that is, how you moved from one thought to the next or how one thought leads you to the next;

- key points (paragraphs) should be organised in a logical sequence, for example, most important to least important, or, first to last;

- the consistent use of tense, person, style, tone and grammar will also facilitate the reader to move more comfortably through the piece.

Using graphics in your written assessment work

It may be necessary to insert figures, tables, images or other graphics within your written work. They should only be used if they can add to or support your text and they should be located at a point within your text that is relevant to the reader (University of Birmingham, 2015). **Figures** are graphs, diagrams or illustrations/images. **Tables** are data presented in tabular form. These graphics may be copied from another source, which must be acknowledged, or may be entirely your own work (University of Birmingham, 2015).

Images you will find on the web are protected by copyright law and cannot be simply cut and pasted into your work. You must always give a source for the figure or table, and never use copyright material without acknowledgement (University of Birmingham, 2015).

Labelling Graphics

Each figure or table should be labelled to have:

1. a number sequence that follows the order it appears in the text (e.g. Figure 1, Figure 2, Table 1, Table 2);

2. a title that clarifies what the data is about.

Be consistent about where you place the label, either below or above the graphic.

Referring to Graphics within your written work

If you have gone to the trouble of inserting a figure or table into your written assessment work, it is important to effectively refer to it within the written body of text to maintain the logical flow of your work. You could use statements like:

Figure 1 below suggests that...
Table 2 provides evidence that...
The pie chart (Figure 4), overleaf, indicates that there are more...

Here are two examples of the effective use of a graphic within a piece of text:
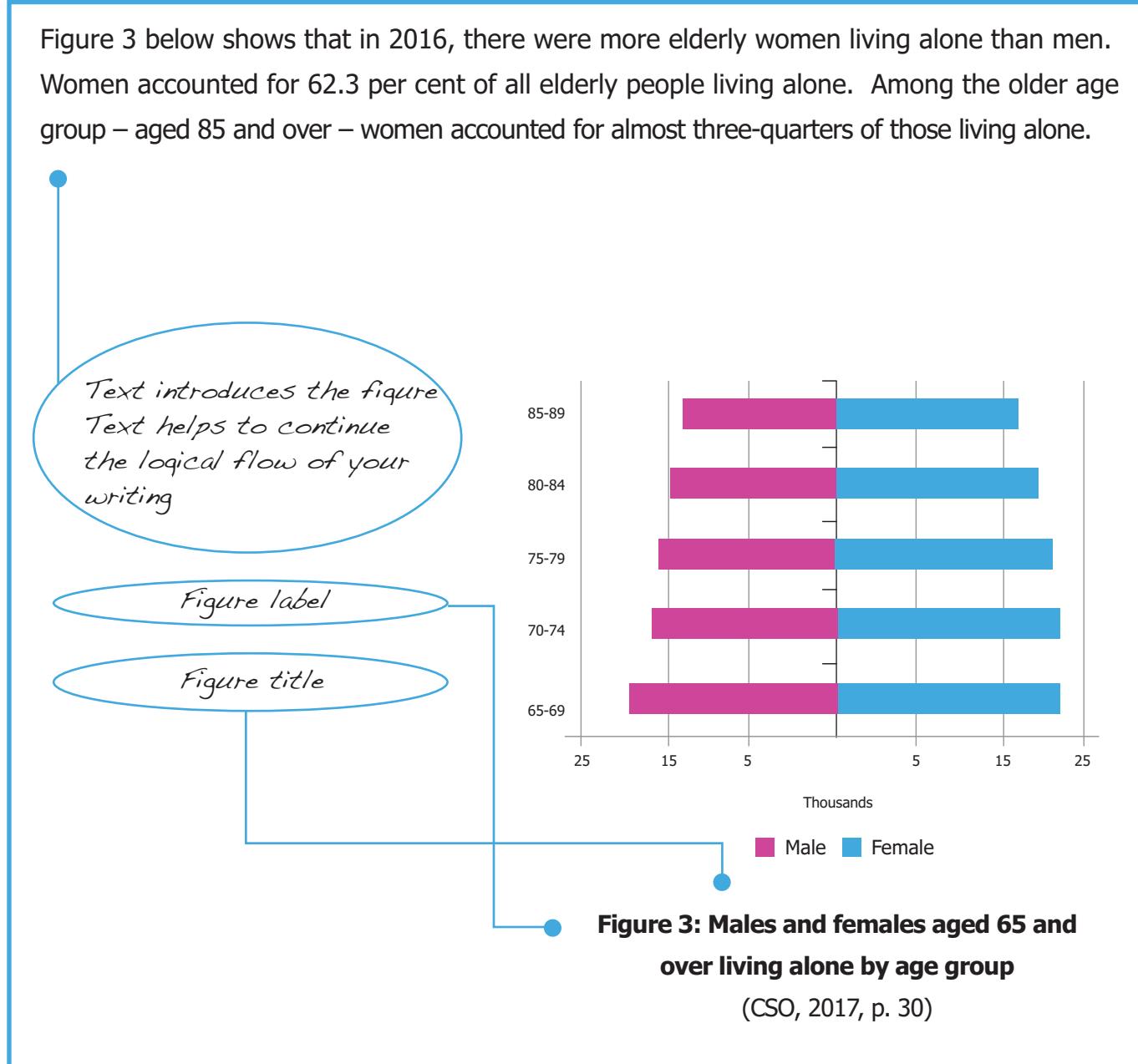
Figure 3 below shows that in 2016, there were more elderly women living alone than men. Women accounted for 62.3 per cent of all elderly people living alone. Among the older age group – aged 85 and over – women accounted for almost three-quarters of those living alone.

Text introduces the figure
Text helps to continue the logical flow of your writing

Figure label

Figure title

85-89						
80-84						
75-79						
70-74						
65-69						
25	15	5		5	15	25

Thousands

■ Male   ■ Female

Figure 3: Males and females aged 65 and over living alone by age group
(CSO, 2017, p. 30)

Figure 7: Example of the use of a graphic within a piece of written text

Figure 4 presents information on the marital status of the population aged 15 years and over in April 2016 compared with 2011. It shows that while the actual number of those married increased by 83,547 over the five years, the percentage of the population who were married remained stable at 37.6 per cent.

The majority of this increase (70,290) was among those married for the first time with a further 9,031 re-married. Same-sex civil partnerships were captured separately for the first time in 2016 and the results show there were 4,226 persons in this category in 2016. A further 706 persons identified as being in a same-sex couple were married.
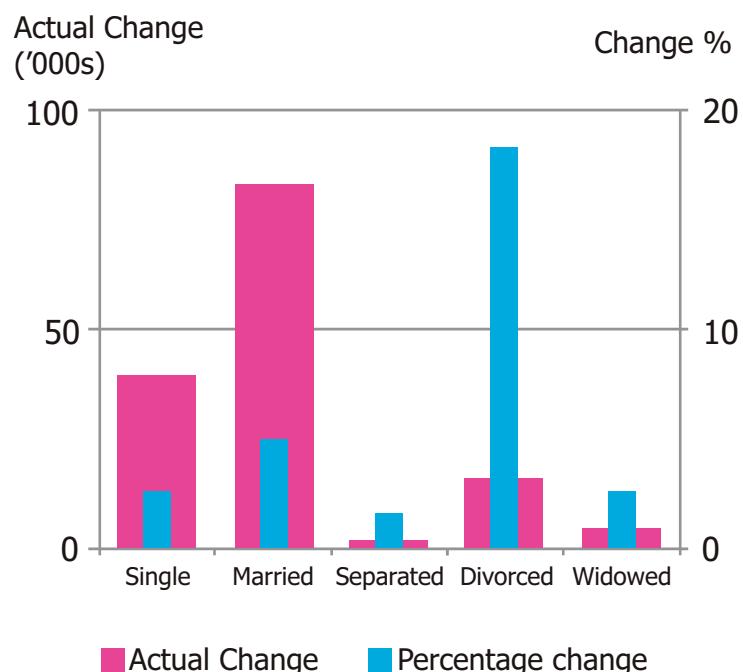
Figure 4: Marital status of the population aged 15 years and over

(CSO, 2017, p. 28)

Figure 8: Example of the use of a graphic within a piece of written text

Structuring your writing

Writing is a process that you have to work through and most writers draft and redraft before submitting a piece of written work. Start by writing the sections where you have most knowledge. Then continue to check the logic, content, relevance and how you are meeting the requirements of the assessment brief. It is important to structure your writing in a way that will bring the reader with you from the introduction, through the points and arguments you are making and on to the conclusion(s) and recommendation(s).

The following pages will provide you with a guide as to how you might structure your written assessment work. On page 52 you will see a typical structure for a piece of academic writing. Your teaching staff may provide you with an outline structure but if they don't, this structure may be useful. The following pages will also outline for you what could be included in the various sections of your academic written work and some phrases that you might find helpful for completing your written assessment work.

NOW GET WRITING THE DRAFT

Introduction

Say what you are going to argue/discuss/explore/research and say how you are going to do that. You may also introduce key terms in the introduction. This section should be approximately 10-15% of the word count.

Main Body

Identify the key issues/points to be argued/discussed and argue/discuss those key points. Support the argument/discussion with appropriate research and reference sources appropriately. This section should be approximately 50-70% of the word count.

Conclusions

Summarise what you said and draw conclusions from your argument/discussion from the main body. There should be no new information introduced in the conclusion. This section should be approximately 10-20% of the word count

Recommendations

Make sensible and realistic recommendations (if required). These should relate to the points made in the main body and the conclusions. These should be approximately 0-15% of word count.

Bibliography/References

Reference all sources cited in your written assessment work using the appropriate referencing system (see Referencing Handbook for the FET Sector). Reference lists and bibliographies do not form part of the word count.

(Sheehy, 2016, p.7)

Writing the introduction

The introduction to your piece of academic writing is your opportunity to capture the interest of the reader and to encourage them to read on. Therefore, it is important that your introduction should clearly introduce the topic or subject of your written assessment work, in a manner that will engage your audience.

The content of the introduction will vary according to the subject matter being explored. Generally, the introduction should:

■ define the context or background of the topic or subject

■ identify the area of study

■ define the topic and/or key terms being explored

■ indicate the purpose of the writing

■ provide signposting as to what will be covered and where

Here are some phrases that may be useful to consider when writing your introduction:

■ In recent years, there has been an increasing interest in...

■ Historically, (…) has been thought to have significant influence on…

■ A key event in the development of...

■ The past (X) years have seen major advances in the field of...

STEP 2 — NOW GET WRITING THE DRAFT

- There is increasing concern that some (target group) are being disadvantaged by...

- This research will focus on (…) rather than (…)

- The aim of this research is to evaluate...

- This assignment/essay/project has been divided into five key sections. The first section deals with...

- This assignment/essay/project begins by providing an overview of the context for the research... It will then go on to (discuss/evaluate/explore/analyse/reflect on)...

- Throughout this assignment/essay/project the term (…) will refer to...

(Adapted from Sheehy, 2016, p.8)

TIP: While these phrases may be useful for the introduction, they can be used throughout your written assessment work.

Writing the main body

In writing the main body for your assessment, it is important to identify the key points that will form the basis of your argument or discussion. Remember to refer back to your assessment brief and notes from your brainstorm or mindmap. For each of the key points that you present in your argument/discussion, consider the following:

- the context

- information gathered

- findings from your primary research (where required by the assessment brief)

- limitations of the research

- transitions between the key points so that the writing flows seamlessly from one key point to the next

- the guidance provided in the assessment brief

- your own position in relation to the key points (where required in the assessment brief)

- examples, references and other evidence to support your position

- critical reflection (where required in the assessment brief).

(Adapted from Sheehy, 2016, p.9)

NOW GET WRITING THE DRAFT

Here are some phrases that may be useful in writing the main body of the piece where the key points are argued/discussed:

- A review of the literature on this topic highlights…

- More recent arguments include…

- Recent studies have identified the links between (…) and (…)…

- In a comparison between the two groups...

- A mixed methods research approach was used…

- I used a case study approach

- This research challenges previous research…

- The argument presented in relation to (…) relies heavily on...

- An obvious problem with this approach is that it fails to take (…) into account…

- There appears to be a gap in the research in relation to...

- The author did not clearly (define the concept/explain the context, etc.)…

- It was not clear that the researcher considered…

- One criticism of the existing literature on (…) may be that it is (dated/focused almost exclusively on a different target group/based on quantitative research only)

- The most significant advantage/disadvantage of…

- These research findings are based on data from studies undertaken (X) years ago and it is unclear if these (differences/anomalies/conflicts/circumstances, etc.) still exist...

- The most (interesting/striking/significant/concerning/frightening) result to emerge from the data is that...

(Adapted from Sheehy, 2016, p.10)

How to structure an argument

In order to make your point and convince your reader, you will need to make a good argument. There are a number of ways that you can do this - see how the argument is developed in the example below. Note that the colours link the strategies to the examples.

■   state your own position on the issue

■   acknowledge there are different positions or sides to the argument

■   give examples

■   give a clear line of reasoning

■   provide evidence that supports your argument

■   make a strong conclusion in order to convince the reader that the argument is made

Climate change and the case for hard decisions

In the face of climate change more has to be done to reduce carbon emissions in the next two years. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) released figures in 2018 that show Ireland will not meet its target to reduce carbon emissions by 20% by 2020. In fact, partly because of the use of fossil fuels in industry and transport, the EPA forecast that Ireland will achieve a mere 1% reduction (EPA, 2018a). Brave decisions must be taken at a national level such as taxing carbon-producing fossil fuel activities and at the same time investing in the development of so-called clean fuels and carbon catcher systems.

Such decisions will come up against opposition. For one, aspects are likely to be unpopular with the general public because it may mean many people having to pay more for transport and home heating. Riots in the streets, such as the 'yellow jacket' protests in France starting in late 2018, show just how strong public opposition can be and how it can force a government to back down on imposing environmental tax (Willsher, 2018).

For another, there are climate change deniers who argue that global warming is not caused by man-made activities and that attempts to reduce carbon emissions only damage industry, the economy and livelihoods. US President Trump for example has been quoted as saying about climate change 'But I don't know that it's man-made' and that complying with the Paris Agreement on reducing greenhouse gas emissions would have cost millions of jobs and economic revenue (Friedman, 2018).

It is understandable that attempts to reduce carbon emissions will have difficult consequences. However, it is crucial to remember that climate change is, for many, the most pressing problem facing the world today. Carbon emissions from fossil fuels contribute in large part to the rise in global temperature (EPA, 2018b). The resulting environmental devastation that is already evident in climate chaos may ultimately be a human catastrophe. Governments everywhere need to make tough decisions that prioritise our longer-term interests over short term interests. Our future depends on it.

Reference list for example of argument on page 58

EPA. (2018a) *We need to move away from fossil fuels, EPA emissions projections show*. Dublin: Environmental Protection Agency. Available from: http://www.epa.ie/newsandevents/news/pressreleases2018/name,64049,en.html [accessed 19 December 2018].

EPA. (2018b) *So what causes climate change?* Wexford: Environmental Protection Agency. Available from http://www.epa.ie/climate/communicatingclimatescience/whatisclimatechange/ [accessed 19 December 2018].

Friedman, L. (2018) 'I Don't Know That It's Man-Made,' Trump Says of Climate Change. It Is. *The New York Times*, 15 October. Available from https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/15/climate/trump-climate-change-fact-check.html [accessed 19 December 2018].

Willsher, K. (2018) 'Gilets jaunes' protesters threaten to bring France to a standstill. *The Guardian*, 16 November. Available from https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/nov/16/gilet-jaunes-yellow-jackets-protesters-france-standstill [accessed 19 December 2018].

Writing the conclusion

The conclusion is about tying up the ideas and points that have been argued/discussed in the main body of your written assessment work. Conclusions are generally short and usually serve both to summarise and bring together the main areas covered in the writing as well as to give a final comment, judgement or opinion on what has been discussed or argued.

TIP: Only information included in the main body of the text should be referred to in the conclusion section. Do not introduce new information in the conclusion.

Here are some phrases that may be useful in writing the conclusion(s) of your written assessment work:

■ This assignment/essay/project has explored the (importance/significance/impact, etc.) of...

■ The purpose of this assignment/essay/project was to (evaluate/analyse/determine/reflect on/consider)...

■ This assignment/essay/project clearly demonstrates the linkages between...

■ One of the more significant findings from this study is...

■ The most noteworthy finding of this research is…

■ The results of the research suggest that...

■ This research project has generated enhanced understanding of...

■ Therefore, it can be concluded that...

■ The implication of this is...

(Adapted from Sheehy, 2016, p. 11)

Writing recommendations

You may or may not be required to include recommendations and the assessment brief will indicate if these are required. Having written your conclusion(s) it should be relatively straightforward to identify some recommendations. These can include suggestions for improvements in relation to the key points in your argument and/or suggestions for future research or development. Recommendations should be realistic and brief.

Here are some phrases that may be useful in writing the recommendations of your written assessment work:

- The results of this study highlight the need for further investigation in the area of...

- A comparative analysis on the experiences of (…) may yield interesting results…

- An improvement to (…) is recommended…

- Increased monitoring of the implementation of (…) is recommended…

- Additional training in the areas highlighted in the research is recommended….

- In order to meet (legislative/governing/regulatory, etc.) requirements, (…) it is suggested…

- The findings of this study highlight a number of potential courses of action...

- A targeted/focussed intervention may be useful/appropriate in order to address…

- An approach worth considering might be to…

- Clearly, there is an identified need in relation to…

- It would be interesting to…

(Adapted from Sheehy, 2016, p. 12)

How to think critically when writing

Critical thinking skills are sometimes described as "higher order" skills – that is, skills requiring ways of thinking that are deeper and more complex than the kind of everyday thinking that we use to, say, cook a meal or decide what clothes to wear.

A framework that describes different levels of thinking can be helpful to start to understand the concept of critical thinking. Blooms Taxonomy of Educational Objectives (1956) is one of the best -known of these (see Figure 9).

'Creating', 'evaluating' and 'analysing' are categorised here as being higher-order skills.

Bloom's Taxonomy

Produce new or original work
Design, assemble, construct, conjecture, develop, formulate, author, investigate

Justify a stand or decision
Appraise, argue, defend, judge, select, support, value, critique, weigh

Draw connections among ideas
Differentiate, organise, relate, compare, contrast, distinguish, examine, experiment, question, test

Use information in new situations
Execute, implement, solve, use, demonstrate, interpret, operate, schedule, sketch

Explain ideas or concepts
Classify, describe, discuss, explain, identify, locate, recognise, report, select, translate

Recall facts and basic concepts
Define, duplicate, list, memorise, repeat, state

Create	Evaluate	Analyse
Apply	Understand	Remember

Figure 9: Bloom's taxonomy (Sjolander, 2019)

Here is a selection of phrases that may be helpful in demonstrating your ability to write critically in your academic work:

Previous studies in this area have not dealt with…

These results were based upon data from over 30 years ago and therefore may not accurately reflect the current situation…

The author offers no explanation for the distinction between X and Y.

The study would have been more interesting if it had included…

A more comprehensive study would include all the groups of…

A better study would examine a large, randomly selected sample of societies with…

The most important of these criticisms is that Smith failed to note that…

Many analysts now argue that this strategy has not been successful. Jones (2003), for example, argues that…

Jones (2003) has also questioned why…

A recently published article by Smith *et al.* (2011) casts doubt on Jones' assumption that…

(Adapted from the University of Manchester, 2019)

Referencing

Referencing is a standard method of acknowledging the sources of information you have consulted when preparing your written assessment work. Referencing is necessary to ensure that:

■ all your arguments are clearly supported by evidence

■ you follow academic standards/conventions

■ research that you have read and/or undertaken is convincing

■ the reader can find the sources that you used

■ the assessor can see how widely that you have read

■ you showcase a good knowledge of the subject matter

■ the assessment work will reflect expected good academic values and practice

■ you avoid plagiarism

■ the assessment work that you submitted is credible

(Adapted from FESS/ETBI, 2019, p.12)

For further information on referencing and how to reference the various sources of information that you may use in completing your written assessment work, please refer to the Referencing Handbook for the Further Education and Training (FET) Sector (2019). That handbook includes information on what referencing is, why referencing is necessary, what sources need to be referenced, plagiarism and how to avoid it and it provides an easy-to-follow three-step process.

The three-step process guides you through sourcing and recording your information sources, making in-text citations and building your reference list. The second part of the handbook shows you how to reference all of the different sources that you are likely to use in the completion of your assessment work.

The Referencing Handbook for the Further Education and Training (FET) Sector is available from https://fess.ie/images/stories/ResourcesForTutors/Referencing_Handbook_files/Referencing_Handbook_February_2019.pdf.

Why review your work?

It is very important that you leave enough time after completing your written assessment work to re-read (review) the work as a whole and make any changes before submission. Very few people are capable of writing a perfect version of anything on their first attempt. Many people even draft simple messages before writing the final version (e.g. birthday cards). Writing for your course requires even more thought.

A piece of writing can go through a number of drafts to improve clarity and ensure that the necessary points outlined in the assessment brief have been addressed. Ideally, you should finish drafting your written assessment work several days before the deadline date so that there will be sufficient time to review it. There are a number of steps that may make reviewing your work easier and more effective:

Print a copy of your assignment to read, rather than reading it on the computer screen. Many people find this to be an easier way to read longer pieces of writing, and to see their own writing 'with new eyes'. Typewritten work is easier to read than handwritten work.

After writing the draft, it is helpful to take a break from it before reviewing it. This may help to clear your head and renew your focus.

Reading your assignment aloud may help you determine if your draft of your written assessment work:
- meets the requirements of the assessment brief
- is logical and clear in the discussion/argument
- shows that the main and supporting ideas are grouped in a way that is understandable to your reader
- shows that the ideas and information flow logically from one to the next
- is appropriately referenced
- has sentences and paragraphs that are complete and grammatically accurate
- is free from errors

It is important to remove information, descriptions, etc. that are not useful or that do not add to the draft written assessment work.

Try to imagine reading your assignment from the perspective of someone else – your assessor, the person marking your work, an employer – to change your focus from being the writer to being the reader.

Ask someone else to read your draft written assessment work or read it to them and take feedback. They may be able to identify elements that do not make sense or are unclear.
Read more on the topic to make sure that you have included all of the key points in your draft.
Consider what other changes you need to make to the draft to support you in achieving a good grade. In this way you are becoming your own assessor and developing your critical thinking and evaluation skills.
Use a spell-check and grammar check on your computer.
Check carefully that references are included for all sources used (see Referencing Handbook for the FET Sector).

Table 8: Useful steps for reviewing your written assessment work

Feedback on written assessment work

Feedback is a crucial part of learning. One-to-one advice on how your work could be perceived by the assessor is invaluable. For this reason, it is useful for somebody to read your work to see if it brings them clearly and logically through all the main points. This person could be a fellow learner, family member or a friend. They may be able to offer comments on what worked well, what did not work well, and provide recommendations for improvement. Feedback can help you to identify your strengths and weaknesses. This is constructive feedback and can be used to improve your performance in producing written work in the future.

TIP:	If the assessor offers you an opportunity to submit a draft of your written assessment work, you should avail of this opportunity to get feedback that may help you improve the quality and grade of your finished work.
TIP:	It is useful to collate all feedback received so that it is easier to look back over it and identify common mistakes to avoid repeating them in the future.

EDITING AND PROOFREADING THE DRAFT

What is editing?

Editing is about preparing your draft assessment work for submission by making modifications to it.

Why do we edit?

It is important that the best possible version of the work is submitted so that you are likely to achieve the best possible mark. Very often people write assessment work in stages but it is important to read the document in its entirety and make sure that any improvements or corrections are made before submission.

What is proofreading?

Proofreading is the final stage when you check for minor errors and you correct them. At this point you read in a superficial way, with your eyes open only to errors in spelling, grammar or punctuation, and typing mistakes (also called typos).

When you write, you get used to seeing what is on the page, including errors, so it can be easy to miss them. To make it easier to spot mistakes, try reading your work aloud. Reading aloud makes you look differently at the written word.

You can also ask a friend to proofread for you. They will have fresh eyes and may see what you cannot see anymore.

There are a number of things that you should consider when editing and proofreading your written work:

Make sure your sentences make sense	Check: ▪ if it makes sense ▪ the sentences flow ▪ the tenses are correct, etc.
Syntax should be easy to follow and understand	Syntax is about making sure that the words and phrases are arranged in a way that makes well-formed sentences. If you have long and rambling sentences, consider breaking them up into a number of shorter sentences. Use punctuation correctly.
Eliminate any words that lessen the impact	Only use words that add value or meaning to what you are saying. Be careful about writing in the same way that you speak, this may lead to you including unnecessary words that do not add meaning or value, for example, "I actually think….", there is no need for the word actually in this phrase.
Hold your reader's attention	It is important to hold the reader's attention in every sentence as well as for the duration of the document. Sometimes if a sentence is too long and complicated you can lose the reader's attention and that may impact how they read the rest of the work.

STEP 4 EDITING AND PROOFREADING THE DRAFT

Remove any terms or phrases that convey an unintended meaning	It is beneficial to think of your reader when writing your work so as to avoid projecting bias or prejudice through your choice of words, even if this is unintentional.
Use a thesaurus	If you find that you are using the same word repeatedly, you should consider looking for alternative words using a thesaurus. Using different words to describe the same thing will help maintain the reader's interest.
Make sure your voice comes through	Writing for assessment is not all about saying what others have said, a very important element is saying what you think of what others have said on the topic. It is essential that your voice comes through in your writing, otherwise it is just a collection of information and opinions from other sources. Your voice should make clear your position on the topic being discussed/argued.
Eliminate clichés	Any phrases that you have heard and read too many times should be avoided, for example, needless to say, vicious circle, etc. Try to make the writing your own and come up with your own metaphors or phrases.

Double check the words and facts you aren't sure about	Sometimes when you are writing you may include something that you are not sure about, these should be checked as part of the editing and proofreading process and referenced accordingly.
Use technology	You will probably be using a word processing package that should highlight spelling, punctuation and other issues and it is important that you make appropriate corrections. Other technology may be available to you that may help with editing and proofreading your work, you should use whatever is made available to you.

Table 9: Some things to consider when editing and proofreading your written assessment work (Adapted from Bielkova, 2019)

TIP: When you are editing your work, you should be looking at style and grammar and make style changes at the sentence level to increase readability and flow.

STEP 4
EDITING AND PROOFREADING THE DRAFT

When editing and proofreading you are likely to end up with a shorter, more concisely written piece than your initial work.

Here is an example of a paragraph that **has not** been edited and proofread:

> Exersise is supposed to be really good for you and I would say that it is really great for our mental health. As they say, physical exercise can be good for a lot of things overcoming the simptoms of depression and it can also improve your mood because exercise sends out cemicals around the body that regulate and manage mood and sleep. Secondly, if, in your life, you are faced a mental or emotional crisis, lots of the research says that exercise has helped people cope with all of that. researchers like Harris, Cronkite and Moos (2006) say that exercise is a way, way better for you than booze or drugs or other negative activities that you could get into. doing some physical activity might also be a good way to meet meet up with new people, make new friends and widen the range of people who could help and and support you As Higgins (2008) rightly says, feeling included socially has a huge big impact on a person's quality of life

Here is an example of the same paragraph that **has** been edited and proofread. With the errors corrected:

> Exercise is one of the most effective ways of improving our mental health. Firstly, physical exercise can counteract the symptoms of depression and increase mood as exercise releases chemicals that regulate mood and sleep. Additionally, exercise can help people cope in a healthy way when presented with mental or emotional challenges in life. Exercise is a far better alternative to alcohol, drugs or other negative behaviours (Harris, Cronkite and Moos, 2006). Finally, participating in physical activities can offer opportunities for interactions with people and can expand a person's social support networks. Feeling socially included is an important factor in a person's quality of life (Higgins, 2008).

Errors to look out for when you are proofreading

Check for:	Examples
Words that are spelt incorrectly	✗ There are two reasins why … ✔ There are two reasons why …
Verb tenses and forms that are incorrect	✗ Scientists have being searching for a cure … ✔ Scientists have been searching for a cure …
Grammar that is incorrect	✗ Their are two reasons why … ✔ There are two reasons why …
Punctuation marks that are incorrect	✗ There are three potential outcomes; ✔ There are three potential outcomes:
Typos	✗ Research " on this ttopic points out … ✔ Research on this topic points out …
Extra spaces	✗ The population is aging. According to … ✔ The population is aging. According to …

Table 10: Errors to look out for when proofreading

PRESENTING AND SUBMITTING FINISHED WRITTEN ASSESSMENT WORK

Presenting your written assessment work

Once you are happy with your written assessment work and you think that it is ready to submit, it is a good idea to check it for presentation. There may be further things that you can do to make the document clear and easier to follow. Many centres and colleges have an agreed house style which will provide you with information about how your written assessment should be presented. If there is no guideline available, the following may be useful:

Cover page	The cover page generally includes: ■ module name and code ■ title of the assessment ■ submission date ■ name of person to whom it must be submitted ■ name of person submitting the work (you) ■ FET centre/college logo.
Table of contents	A list of chapters/sections with the page numbers.
Glossary	An alphabetical list of terms that will be referred to in the document, with an explanation of their meaning.
Font	Using a consistent style and size of font, such as, Arial, Calibri, Verdana, etc., makes the document easier to read. A 12pt font is considered standard. Only one font should be used throughout, unless different fonts are required by the assessment brief. Headings/sub-headings should use the same font but can be bolded and/or can be slightly larger in size.
Headings and sub-headings	It is helpful to use headings/sub-headings in your document to indicate where certain information is located and it may help with the logic and flow.

Spacing and margins	Double-line spacing makes a document easier to read and allows space for the assessor to include comments or feedback. The pre-set margins on word processing packages are generally sufficient as they allow for binding.
Alignment	There should be consistency throughout the document as to whether text is aligned with the left side of the page or justified (where the text is aligned with the margins on both the left and right).
Bulleting	Bullet points can be useful for highlighting key points or including lists of items in the text, but should be used appropriately. When using bullet points, it is visually more pleasing and less distracting to use one style of bullets throughout, unless you use a different bullet as a sub-bullet. When numbering is being used, it is better to use the same style throughout.
Headers and footers	The header is the information that is in the top margin of the document and the footer is located in the bottom margin, these may include information that can be repeated on every page of the document. It may be useful to include: ■ title of the assessment piece in the header ■ your name and page number in the footer.
Page numbering	It is useful to include page numbers as they can be used to reference information as well as identifying if pages are missing. A consistent format should be used, for example, 1, page 1 or page 1 of 10, etc.

STEP 5
PRESENTING AND SUBMITTING FINISHED WRITTEN ASSESSMENT WORK

Referencing system	Sources of information must be referenced using the referencing system indicated by staff in your centre/college, see Referencing Handbook for the Further Education and Training (FET) Sector.
Tables and figures	Tables are a useful way of organising data and presenting it in a way that is easy to engage with. Each table should have a title and be numbered, for example, Table 1 – Age profile of participants. A list of tables should be included at the front of the document. Figures include everything else, for example pictures, drawings, scanned material, photographs, charts and graphs that are used to show information or illustrate a point within your document. Each figure should have a title and also be numbered, for example, Figure 1 – Photo of confusing health and safety signage. Tables and figures must be referred to in the text of the document. Generally the table or figure would follow the paragraph in which reference is made to it.
Tense	It is important that there is consistency in the tense used throughout the work.
Writing in the 1st, 2nd or 3rd person	There should be a consistent approach to writing in the 1st, 2nd or 3rd person throughout the document. Generally, one approach should be used throughout.

Table 11: Things to consider in relation to the presentation of written assessment work

Submitting your written assessment work

Written assessment work should be submitted as per the instructions you have received from your centre or college. Submitting written assessment work can be done via Turnitin, Moodle, email, in hard copy or by other means. It is essential that you submit your work by the deadline as late submissions may have consequences for you.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 Types of writing you may encounter in FET

Some other types of writing that you may encounter or engage with are as follows:

Types of writing	Examples of writing
Creative – this is the type of writing that can be fiction or non-fiction based and is focussed on the original style of writing of the author rather than imitating existing genres of writing. It can include novels, short stories, biographies, poems, screenplays, etc. (The Student Room, 2019)	Torrential rain poured down in icy sheets like needles upon my face. The wind didn't howl, it screamed. The rain was not falling: it was driven, hard, merciless, torrential (The Student Room, 2019). John Smith has a couple of years left until he retires from his job as a Doctor in Dublin where he has worked for over 25 years. John has loved this job as it has allowed him to contribute to improving the quality of the lives of his patients as well as, on occasion, saving lives.
Descriptive – this is the writing you will find in a range of texts which may include descriptions of events, processes, scenes, etc. Basically, any writing that is describing something in a way that you can picture it. These may include reports, books, poems, etc.	Chocolate chip cookies are one of the most popular desserts in the world. They can either be crispy or soft and have a sweet smell to them reminiscent of a bakery. They taste rich and melt in your mouth. When they bake, they 'wrinkle' up in the oven, and the combination of the nooks and crannies in the dough with the mouth-watering chocolate chips on top make them hard to resist (Quramo Publishing, 2019).

APPENDICES

Types of writing	Examples of writing
	Values and ethics are principal to any organisation. Values can be defined as those things that are substantial/valuable to or treasured by someone, it's what we as professional people judge to be correct both personally and organisationally. Therefore, ethics can be defined as moral standards that rule one's actions or the administering of an activity (123 Help Me, 2019).
Expository – A piece written with the intention of explaining or describing something. This is the type of writing you will find in text books and articles, which are fact-based writings. You may be using these sources as evidence in your academic writing.	Advances in science and technology have made the use of "green" energy possible. In places where climate conditions permit, people can use solar energy or wind energy for power. Solar energy is the use of sunlight for energy and power. Humans can harness the energy of the sun by installing solar panels on their homes or businesses. Humans have also found ways to harness the power of the wind by using wind turbines to capture wind energy. Both forms of "green" energy are being used more and more.
	English is the language spoken throughout most of Canada, but in Quebec, the most populated province, and in areas near Quebec, French is the first language.

Types of writing	Examples of writing
	Therefore, Canadians recognize French and English as official languages that are used in business and government. Many people are bilingual and easily go from French to English and vice versa when speaking with tourists (Learn American English, 2019).
Narrative – this is the type of writing that you will find in novels, biographies, etc. Basically, it is telling a story and can be based on fact or fiction. It can be educational, motivational or entertaining.	It was July 21, 1969, and Neil Armstrong awoke with a start. It was the day he would become the first human being to ever walk on the moon. The journey had begun several days earlier, when on July 16th, the Apollo 11 launched from Earth headed into outer space. On board with Neil Armstrong were Michael Collins and Buzz Aldrin. The crew landed on the moon in the Sea of Tranquillity a day before the actual walk. Upon Neil's first step onto the moon's surface, he declared, "That's one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind (NASA, 2019)."
	Ever since I could remember, I have spent Christmas at my grandmother's house, a house which is full of comfort, warmth, and happiness. At Christmas, I have always been able to escape the cold and dark real world

APPENDICES

Types of writing	Examples of writing
	allowing myself to truly enjoy just several moments in time. These moments have left impressionable memories from my childhood making Christmas a holiday that is special to me and my family. It is a time for my family to get together, share stories, laugh, and even cry (123 Help Me, 2019).
Persuasive – this is the type of non-fiction writing which can be used in the development of logical arguments and is used in advertisements, debates, etc. Words are carefully chosen and teamed with logical argument to persuade the reader.	School uniforms and why students wear them has been a topic of concern and debate for as long as these clothes have been around. Though people who argue that wearing uniforms in educational institutions make people appear all equal, give a sense of community, and teach discipline, I believe there are more disadvantages to wearing uniforms than advantages. Namely, demanding students wear uniforms takes away freedom, they are often uncomfortable, they are a waste of money, they promote conformity over individuality, and children's self-image is damaged more when they wear uniforms at school (Academic Help, 2019a).

Types of writing	Examples of writing
	Though nowadays it is more often claimed that humanity can develop without causing damage to nature, there still are strong opposing arguments to this hypothesis. Development assumes economic growth, and economic growth is impossible without industry, which needs energy resources. Currently, the range of goods required by people has expanded significantly compared to the times before modern industrial technology was employed on a mass scale. People feel the need, not only for primary essentials, such as food and a roof over their heads, but also for various facilities and luxuries. Providing humanity with these objects involves the exploitation of natural resources. In turn, the conventional sources of energy we use today cause pollution, so economic growth is almost inevitably associated with environmental damage (123 Help Me, 2019).

Depending on the programme of education and training that you are undertaking, it is likely that you will be engaging with all of these and other types of writing and you may need to complete assessments using one or more of these types of writing.

APPENDICES

Appendix 2 – Checklist for completing written assessment work

Assessment Brief	Follow the instructions in your assessment brief and where you are unclear as to what you have to do, check with the assessor so that you know what you have to do, how you have to do it and what you have to submit.	☐
Brainstorm	Did you consider all of the ideas from your brainstorming activity?	☐
Mind map	If you used a mind-map, did you cover all your points and linkages made?	☐
Planning and preparation	Did you undertake appropriate research?	☐
	Did you plan to make sure that what you are including reflects the requirements of the assessment brief?	☐
Drafting and structure	Did you plan the logical flow for the structure of the writing so that one point flows logically to the next? Do you have:	☐
	■ a compelling introduction with clear signposting	☐
	■ a clear, concise and supported discussion/argument of the key issues/points/ideas	☐
	■ a logical and robust conclusion(s)	☐
	■ recommendations (if appropriate)	☐
	■ referencing/bibliography.	☐
	Where a claim is made, it must be supported. You need to:	
	■ describe why you, as the writer, are making this claim	☐
	■ argue why you believe this to be the case	☐
	■ explain the context in which you are making this claim	☐
	■ provide adequate support for your claim by referencing other research	☐
	■ work through a series of drafts, improving each one as you go?	☐

Reviewing and revising	Did you review your written work after the first draft?	☐
	Did you make some revisions based on your review of the work so far?	☐
	Do the thoughts, ideas and arguments flow logically from one point to the next?	☐
Editing and proofreading	Have you read over your written assessment work?	☐
	Do the sentences make sense?	☐
	Have you checked for spelling, punctuation and other errors?	☐
Assessment guidelines	Read the brief again. Are you sure that you have included all of the requirements of the assessment brief?	☐
Assessment criteria	Read the brief again.	☐
	Have you ensured that you have completed your work to the level that is required by the verbs used in the assessment criteria, for example, explain, describe, evaluate, etc.?	☐
Tone	Did you address the right audience?	☐
	Did you address the audience in the right way?	
Coherence in the written assessment work	Is the written assessment work:	
	■ clearly and concisely written?	☐
	■ coherent and logical in approach?	☐
	■ objective and balanced?	☐
	■ demonstrating adequate evidence to support the argument?	☐
	■ making links between key points/ideas?	☐
Consider the reader:	Will the reader understand what you are saying?	☐
	Will the work keep the reader interested enough to read to the end?	☐
	Will it provide insightful information to the reader?	☐
	Is it worth investing the time to read it?	☐

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